

SAUDI ARABIA | IN FOCUS

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SAUDI-U.S. RELATIONS

King Abdullah receives telephone call from U.S. President

The Custodian of the Two Holy Mosques King Abdullah bin Abdulaziz received a telephone call on April 16 from U.S. President Barack Obama, who offered his condolences on the death of his sister, Princess Sita bint Abdulaziz bin Abdulrahman. During the telephone conversation, the two leaders discussed Saudi-U.S. relations and regional developments, and the King thanked President Obama for his sentiments.

Chief of General Staff receives head of U.S. Central Command

The Chief of the General Staff, Gen. Saleh Al-Mohayya, received the head of U.S. Central Command, Gen. James N. Mattis, and his accompanying delegation in Riyadh on April 16. During the meeting, they exchanged cordial talks and discussed topics of bilateral interest. Gen. Mattis also met with Deputy Chief of the General Staff Lt. Gen. Hussein Al-Qabeel; Chief of the National Guard Prince Meteb bin Abdullah bin Abdulaziz; Assistant Minister of Defense and Aviation and Inspector General for Military Affairs Prince Khalid bin Sultan bin Abdulaziz; and Commander of the Royal Saudi Air Force Lt. Gen. Mohammed Al-Ayesh.

Saudi delegation attends global economic meetings in Washington

Finance ministers, central banks governors and other economic officials of member states of the Group of 20 (G-20) met in Washington on April 14. The Saudi delegation was led by Minister of Finance Dr. Ibrahim Al-Assaf and included Governor of the Saudi Arabian Monetary Agency (SAMA) Dr. Mohammed Al-Jasser; Deputy President and Managing Director of the Saudi Development Fund Yusuf Al-Bassam; and a number of other senior officials.

On April 16, the Saudi delegation also attended the 23rd meeting of the International Monetary and Finance Committee of the International Monetary Fund (IMF) in Washington. Addressing the Committee, Dr. Al-Assaf stressed the strength and safety of the Saudi banking sector, which enjoys high profitability and financial solvency. Dr. Al-Assaf noted that the continuing strong performance of the Saudi economy, supported by large governmental investments in infrastructure projects and the social sector, has contributed to the increasing of IMF forecasts for Saudi economic growth this year. As for developments in the energy markets, the Minister of Finance reiterated the Kingdom's commitment to

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strengthening the stability of the oil market, for the benefit of producers and consumers alike, and supporting global economic growth. He commended the growing cooperation between oil producers and consumers, pointing specifically to the signing of the Charter of the International Energy Forum in Riyadh last February.

Finally, the delegation attended a meeting of the Development Committee of the World Bank in Washington on February 16 and 17. Delivering a speech, Dr. Al-Assaf stressed the impact of high food prices on global food security and called for the protection of the poor. He highlighted Saudi efforts in this regard, noting that the Kingdom helps poor countries increase their agricultural lands and contributes to regional and international development institutions.

ARAB WORLD

GCC Foreign Ministers call for peace in Yemen, condemn Iran

The Foreign Ministers of the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) member states held their 33rd extraordinary session in Riyadh on April 17, during which they discussed the GCC initiative to end the crisis in Yemen. The meeting was attended by a delegation from the Yemeni opposition, led by President of the Preparatory Committee for National Dialogue Mohamed Salem Basendwah. In a statement released afterwards, GCC Secretary General Dr. Abdulatif Al-Zayani said that talks are ongoing with both the Yemeni government and the opposition. The goal is to end the bloodshed in Yemen, he stated, and to reach a compromise within the framework of the GCC's previously announced initiative.

In a separate statement, the GCC Foreign Ministerial Council praised the positive developments that have taken place recently in Bahrain, particularly the restoration of security. The ministers rejected Iran's false allegations regarding Bahrain and condemned its malicious interference into the affairs of its Arab neighbors. Furthermore, the Council called upon the international community, led by the U.N. Security Council, to take all necessary measures to end Iranian interventions, provocations and threats that seek to foment sedition and subversion within the GCC states.

Saudi Initiative to Combat AIDS in GCC Countries inaugurated

Minister of Health Dr. Abdullah Al-Rabeeah inaugurated the Saudi Initiative to Combat AIDS in the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) Countries at a ceremony April 16 in Riyadh. The initiative was organized by the Ministry of Health in collaboration with the Executive Board of the GCC Health Ministers Council. Addressing the gathering, Dr. Al-Rabeeah emphasized the commitment of the GCC Ministries of Health to supporting programs to combat the spread of AIDS and to provide all possible means of health care to treat the virus.

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Bahrain's Embassy in the U.S. Responds to the Tom Lantos Human Rights Commission Hearing on the Situation in Bahrain

WASHINGTON D.C. (April 25, 2011)- The Kingdom of Bahrain's Embassy in the U.S. recognizes the concerns of the Tom Lantos Human Rights commission but disagrees with the grievances aired in the commission's hearing on April 25.

Bahrain is a progressive Arab nation and a longtime ally of the United States. Historically, Bahrain has been at the forefront of ensuring civil liberties and democratic reforms in the Middle East. Bahrain respects and protects all religions and ethnic groups.

The political unrest exhibited in Bahrain was characterized by violent sectarianism. Bahrain's situation is unique from our neighbors in the greater region like Syria, Libya, and Egypt and it is wrong for the commission to treat the situation in Bahrain as indistinguishable. Actions in response to the protests went to stabilize the duress in our country and preserve our multicultural, multi-ethnic society.

The protesters did not use peaceful tactics and during the height of unrest, protesters overran our main thoroughfare and threatened our infrastructure. Bahrain was under siege and any sense of normal life was brought to a halt. Schools, businesses and ministries could not operate. The financial harbor was temporarily shut down due to road blocks and the main hospital was transformed into an opposition political command center.

Bahrain's protests had turned violent and the government was forced to respond. In order to bolster security at our critical infrastructure and to maintain national stability, Bahrain called on our regional neighbors. The nation exercised its sovereign right to invite in the Gulf Cooperation Council's (GCC) Peninsula Shield Force to aid in our peacekeeping efforts.

This was not an act of external force or a foreign invasion. This was a necessary step to ensure Bahrain return to a state of normalcy. Since then, Bahrain's hospitals, schools, banks and shopping centers have opened for the public and we continue to make strides to resume normal life.

The Commission also made note that the Bahraini government has targeted and removed religious buildings and shrines in this time of duress. The government has not targeted specific sites. These buildings are makeshift, illegal constructions and the government has continually made sure that places of worship adhere to national regulations.

Bahrain's unflinching commitment to human rights was demonstrated by Bahrain's Crown Prince's proposed national dialogue. This effort went to make progress on meaningful democratic reforms for all Bahraini people. The national dialogue had no ceiling to the change and reforms it could have yielded. That offer went unanswered for well over one month while violent protests continued. Opposition groups refused to engage in talks and demanded that the government meet preconditions before a national dialogue began.

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The Embassy appreciates the concern of the Tom Lantos Human Rights Commission. Bahrain is committed to a long lasting national unity between all Bahraini people and we will continue our work to find peace and to ensure human rights are enjoyed by all Bahrainis. The government of Bahrain regrets the loss of any life, regardless of religious sect or ethnicity, and we know we have a long road ahead of us. The government will work with all Bahrainis to strike a balance in peace and to achieve enduring equality.

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This has been distributed by Qorvis Communications on behalf of the Kingdom of Bahrain. More information is available at the United States Department of Justice, Washington, DC.

Press Contact: Matt Lauer
Phone: 202-683-3127
Email: mlauer@qorvis.com

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Bahrain's Embassy in the U.S. Says Event Held at United States Institute of Peace (USIP) Fails to Offer a Measured Account of Events in Bahrain

WASHINGTON (April 26, 2011)- The Kingdom of Bahrain's Embassy in the United States believes that the event titled "Bahrain on the Edge" which was held on April 26 at the United States Institute of Peace (USIP) failed to offer a measured and fair account of the situation in Bahrain.

The event, jointly presented by the USIP and National Democratic Institute (NDI) only brought together leaders of opposition groups in Bahrain, mainly Al Wefaq Islamic National Society and Al Wa'ad Party.

The Embassy hopes that true, meaningful discourse between all sides can occur in the future. To bring about a comprehensive understanding about the situation in Bahrain it is critical to consider perspectives from a variety of groups and interested parties.

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Press Contact: Matt Lauer
Phone: 202-683-3127
Email: mlauer@qorvis.com

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